Be a "Champion" of Culture Change in Adoption

> *"If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got."*
> **(Anonymous)**

The National Adoption Strategy Team in conjunction with the University of East Anglia (the culture change in adoption team) are recruiting **'champions'** across the country to help stimulate and guide change in their agency's culture around maintaining relationships in adoption. This guide will explain what we mean by this, and how we will support you (and how you can support each other) through a *Community of Practice* and a series of webinars.

Embracing a culture change in adoption

- Over many years we have heard increasing appeals from different voices, including people with lived experience, the judiciary and researchers, to improve social work practices around maintaining important relationships after adoption.
- Problems, barriers and potential solutions have been identified across different areas of adoption practice and in relation to the whole spectrum of professionals connected to adoption (including children's social workers, adoption social workers in LAs, VAAs and RAAs, birth family support workers, Cafcass, IROs, legal professionals and the judiciary).
- It is now time to move forward and transform how contact is considered, planned, and supported. A culture change in adoption is required - a process of transforming values, beliefs, norms and practices - so that better outcomes around maintaining relationships can be achieved.
- Change can be challenging; it is difficult to abandon the comfort of the routine and venture into the unfamiliar. It can also be overwhelming to think about all the changes that need to be made. However, culture change doesn't have to be done at once. *Small manageable steps* can be taken, allowing a gradual adaption to new processes and ways of thinking. To help with this, the adoption culture change team is offering support.

> **Findings from a review of studies exploring contact & children's wellbeing** (Iyer et al, 2020)
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> *"The key question is …how best to facilitate positive experiences and the meaningful involvement of the people who matter to the child."*
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> - Focus on the quality of contact
> - Listen to the views of children and young people.
> - Recognise the significance of siblings, grandparents, wider family and friends.
> - Ensure that all involved are clear about the purpose of contact.
> - Ensure that contact plans are tailored to each child and regularly reviewed.
> - Ensure skilled professional support is available.

Why have agency champions to help culture change in adoption?

- Increasing knowledge through courses and training alone may not be sufficient or effective to change practice. Learning is better when grounded in what practitioners actually *do* and the particular dynamics of their situation. It can be important to have internal guides - or *'champions'* for change - who can help teams to integrate knowledge into everyday practices in their specific organisational context.
- Champions do not necessarily "lead" the change but can help to galvanise or accelerate it within the agency. They are also <u>not</u> solely responsible for change (there may be more than one champion in an agency, champions may be part of a working group, and should have their manager support).
- Champions can help make change manageable – for example by identifying specific practice areas in their agency and selecting actions that could be taken to improve practice as a priority focus.
- Anyone who feels they could inspire others in their agency to rethink practices around adoption and has an open mind and a passion to improve post adoption relationships for the best of all involved in adoption can be a champion for change.

A "champion" is an implementation-related role occupied by people who:

(1) are internal to an organization
(2) have an intrinsic interest and commitment to implementing a change
(3) work diligently to drive implementation forward;
(4) are enthusiastic, dynamic, energetic, personable, and persistent; and
(5) have the strength of conviction.

Miech, E. J., Rattray, N. A., Flanagan, M. E., Damschroder, L., Schmid, A. A., & Damush, T. M. (2018). Inside help: an integrative review of champions in healthcare-related implementation. SAGE open medicine, 6, 2050312118773261

Belonging to a 'Community of Practice' of champions across the country

- Engaging with other 'champions' working in broadly similar contexts can help to support, inspire and motivate workers. This can be done through a ***Community of Practice*** (CoP), a network of professionals that can collaborative together in a supportive process of collective learning.
- The culture change team will help set up a CoP of 'champions and facilitate it throughout the life of the project (which will run until the end of March 2025).
- Thorough regular and creative engagement with each other (across a shared Teams platform, online workshops and potentially some localised face to face meetings) champions can focus on the issues that matter to them, and learn from each other's specific knowledge, different perspectives and experience. They can co-learn the best possible ways to progress and address to practice challenges and obstacles. They can share resources and examples of innovative local practices.

Four broad areas for action

1 Initiating and leading culture change

2 Preparing and matching adopters

3 Making child focussed contact plans

4 Supporting relationships

Our programme of training webinars and 'champion' workshops

Webinars

- A programme of 13 one hour webinars will be delivered by a team of researchers from the University of East Anglia (Beth Neil, Julie Young, Ruth Copson, Anne Murphy).
- The webinar series will allow for an in-depth examination of a wide range of topics related to planning and supporting safe and meaningful connections between adopted children and their birth families after adoption.
- The UEA team will be joined by guest speakers, particularly people with lived experience of adoption.
- The webinars will be predominantly aimed at practitioners as the goal is to develop practitioner knowledge and skills around post adoption contact. However *attendance is not restricted to professional groups*, and people with a personal interest are welcome to attend.
- The webinars are free, but registering in advance for each event is required.
- All webinars will be recorded and made available after each event via a YouTube channel.

Online community of practice workshops for champions

- Agencies working in adoption are invited to nominate champions who can act as a catalyst and focal point for change within their agencies.
- The UEA team in collaboration with Vicky Swift (maintaining relationships implementation manager, Adoption England) will facilitate a series of 12 online workshops to support champions.
- Workshops will be *closed to nominated champions*.
- Workshops will last for two hours and will aim to create a collaborative network of professionals who have common interests in maintaining relationships and adoption. This will enable champions to focus on the issues that matter to them, learn from each other's specific knowledge, perspectives and experience, and share resources and examples of innovative local practices.

Webinar and workshop dates

	Webinars (12.30-1.30pm on UEA Centre for Research on Children and Families Teams)	Champion's Workshops (12.30 to 2.30pm on Leeds Council Teams)
October 2023	Thursday 12th October: *Understanding the lifelong identity needs of adopted people*	Tuesday 31st Oct
November 2023	Tuesday 7th Nov: *The needs and experiences of birth family members* Thursday 16th Nov: *The needs and experiences of adoptive parents as they relate to "maintaining relationships"*	Thursday 30th Nov
December 2023	Tuesday 5th Dec: *Contact planning*	
January 2024	Thursday 11th Jan: *Contact in early permanence placements* Tuesday 30th Jan: *Supporting initial meetings between adoptive parents and birth relatives*	Wednesday 17th Jan 2024
February 2024	Thursday 15th Feb: *Making letterbox contact work*	Tuesday 27th Feb
March 2024	Tuesday 5th March: *The experience and outcomes of face-to-face meetings with birth relatives* Thursday 21st March: *Supporting children's meetings with birth relatives*	
April 2024	Tuesday 16th April: *Supporting brothers and sisters to stay in touch*	Thursday 25th April
May 2024	Tuesday 14th May: *Meeting the needs of Black and ethnic minority families*	
June 2024	Tuesday 11th June: *Working with teenagers and young adults*	Wednesday 5th June
July 2024	Tuesday 16th July 2024: *Digital ways of staying in touch*	
August 2024		
September 2024		Tuesday 10th September
October 2024		Thursday 24th October
November 2024		
December 2024		Wednesday 4th December
January 2025		Tuesday 14th January 2025
February 2025		Thursday 27th February
March 2025		Wednesday 26th March

Qualities that can help YOU be a champion for culture change

Vision

It helps to have a clear, compelling vision of what you want to achieve through culture change and how it will benefit children and families.

Communicate and inspire others to share your vision, perhaps by directing people to resources, evidence and stories.

Understanding

Have a good grasp of your *current* organisational culture. Be aware of barriers, outdated policies, or engrained beliefs and other issues that could obstruct change.

Engagement

Engage with staff, families, partners and other stakeholders in the change process. Listen to their views, concerns and suggestions. Involve them in decision-making.

Develop a culture of collaboration, trust and mutual support. Different cultural, ethnic, and personal as well as professional backgrounds bring a wealth of knowledge.

Innovation

Encourage and support innovation and creativity. Be open-minded, and willing to try new approaches, methods and technologies.

Remember to celebrate successes and, when mistakes are made, use them as opportunities for learning.

Resilience

Change brings challenges and uncertainties – all, including you, will need to manage the stress and emotions and that comes with that.

Be careful to balance your workload and priorities. Delegate tasks when appropriate. Set realistic goals and expectations.

Communication

Ensure everyone is aware of any new systems, are clear what is expected of them and understand the reasoning.

Facilitate open communication and ways for staff to provide feedback on the changes (e.g. through regular check-ins, an anonymous suggestion box or regular forums).

Patience

Cultural change doesn't happen overnight. You may face resistance or obstacles.

Acknowledge efforts - even if an initiative isn't a complete success, acknowledging the effort put in can be a morale booster.

Accept that newly adopted strategies are not set in stone.

Celebrate

Big changes can often feel overwhelming, but celebrating the smaller milestones can motivate and create a positive environment.

Share positive stories of change perhaps by creating platforms where teams can share their success stories or innovative solutions they've tried.